

BENCH-BAR COALITION
CHIEF JUSTICE RONALD M. GEORGE
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2005 — 8:30 A.M.

Good morning. I want to welcome you on behalf of the Judicial Council and the entire court system of California. Your support and advocacy for the judicial branch has been a crucial element in our successes in Sacramento during the past year, and I look forward to your continued efforts in the future.

Under the leadership of your very capable co-chairs, Miriam Krinsky and Tony Capozzi, the Bench-Bar Coalition has been a valuable partner in efforts to advance the positions of the judicial branch in Sacramento. Tony is now a member of the Judicial Council, and in that role he will be able directly to bring much of what he has learned working with you to the attention of the policy-making body for the state's judicial branch and to share our concerns with you.

During the past decade, we have focused on creating and maintaining a positive working relationship between the judicial and legislative branches. Of course, the two parts of government have very different roles, and the judicial branch at times may seem hampered by its inability to make promises or guarantee a quid pro quo for positive legislative action. Your assistance in emphasizing the fundamental role of an independent and strong judiciary in our governmental structure is vital to helping us make the case for adequate resources, and in explaining the forces and factors that appropriately guide the conduct of the judicial branch and the individual judges called upon to make decisions on issues of great import.

All issues naturally are of great import to the litigants involved. Whether it is a family law dispute or a traffic ticket or a question of statewide importance that will affect the lives of all Californians, the courts not only must — but are expected to — function based on the rule of law and applicable statutes, rules, and constitutional provisions and not based upon the latest polls.

As members of the Bench-Bar Coalition, you have had a busy year. Many of you participated in the first Day in Sacramento on March 14, visiting nearly 60 legislators and key committee and leadership staff the day I delivered the annual State of the Judiciary address. I thank you for your attendance at the meetings and at the address. Your work in informing those in the legislature about the need for new judgeships, the importance of the court facilities improvement bond, and the adoption of the Uniform Civil Fee proposal have been crucial in advancing each of these initiatives.

For many legislators, your meeting with them is the first — and in some instances the only — contact they have had on these priority issues.

The next day, your planning session mapped out strategies for issue development and an advocacy session that have enhanced the Coalition's effectiveness. One example of follow-up was the open letter that I signed along with your leadership inviting presidents of statewide, local, specialty, ethnic, and women's bar associations to participate in the Coalition. As a result, nearly 20 additional bar associations joined as members.

Later in May, you came to speak with legislators on the day before votes were to be taken on SB 56, the new judgeships bill, and the facilities bond in the Senate Appropriations Committee. Again, your visits helped reinforce the priorities stressed in March, adding more detail and expanding discussions about the proposed judicial branch budget. Both bills passed out of committee the next day.

The momentum generated by these activities has carried forward. More meetings with legislators and bench and bar leaders in your local communities have continued to spread the word about our fundamental message. Our shared focus continues to be on recognizing the judiciary as a co-equal branch of government, promoting and preserving integrity and accountability within the branch, and protecting and enhancing funding for vital programs and services. All these efforts, of course, are intended to ensure that we continue to be able to provide fair and equal access to the courts for all Californians.

In the year ahead, I hope to collaborate with you once again during State of the Judiciary activities and other meetings. The Bench-Bar Coalition has been an active and visible force in support of the judicial branch and the administration of justice. I am certain there will be a broad range of goals of mutual interest that we can work to achieve together. Kate Howard, head of the A.O.C.'s Office of Governmental Affairs is available to assist you at any point. I would also like to recognize the excellent staff support of Dia Poole of O.G.A. and Mary Viviano from the State Bar. They certainly deserve special recognition.

You already have made a positive difference, and again I thank you for your hard work and commitment. I hope your conference here is as successful as the ones that have preceded it, and I look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

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